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RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 0684  
RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 2563  
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN PRIORITY 8857  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 001730

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UN](#) [XF](#) [LE](#) [IT](#)  
SUBJECT: ITALY: NO TO UNIFIL MANDATE CHANGE; SEEKS EARLY  
INCLUSION IN UNSC TALKS

REF: ROME 1588

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Classified By: A/DCM David D. Pearce for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. MFA Near East Office Director Luciano Pezzotti said August 7 that Italy did not want changes to the UNIFIL mandate. He asked for early inclusion in UNSC talks on mandate renewal. PM diplomatic adviser Marco Carnelos echoed this. Both GOI officials stressed to poloff the GOI's commitment to Lebanon and the UNIFIL mission. And both expressed general support for initiatives to address the porous Syria/Lebanon border, but maintained they should be separate and distinct from UNIFIL. Carnelos also expressed concern over divisions in the Lebanese Christian community and said Syrian President Asad had been strangely optimistic on Lebanon in a telephone call with PM Prodi. End Summary.

Italy Supports Technical UNIFIL Mandate roll-over  
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¶2. (C) MFA Near East Office Director Luciano Pezzotti August 7 told poloff that Italy did not want UNIFIL's mandate modified to facilitate border monitoring. He said UNIFIL was not large enough to do the job, and it wouldn't be possible to get contributing nations to sufficiently increase the force to a level that would make border monitoring feasible. As an example, he pointed out that the UN had recently asked for a slight increase in troop levels to meet intelligence reporting requirements but the contributing countries (Italy included) were not able to meet the request. Pezzotti told poloff that Lebanese PM Siniora also favored leaving the UNIFIL mandate unchanged and had specifically asked the GOI to press the USG not to seek to expand it.

Seek Early Inclusion in UNSC UNIFIL Discussions  
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¶3. (C) Pezzotti stressed that the GOI wanted to be included at an early stage in UNSC discussions on the UNIFIL mandate renewal, given Italy's role as the single largest troop contributor and as the current UNIFIL commander. In particular, he said Italy would like to see a draft and have an opportunity to respond before the draft is circulated to the other non-permanent UNSC members.

GOI Generally Supportive of Border Initiatives  
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¶4. (C) Pezzotti said the GOI still supports the idea of a

civilian border training initiative or something along the lines of the German/Norwegian initiative, but he stressed it should have nothing to do with UNIFIL. The PM's Diplomatic Advisor for the Middle East, Marco Carnelos, echoed Pezzotti's comments adding that he found the German/Norwegian proposal for monitors on the Lebanese side inadequate. He maintained that effective border monitoring could only be done from both sides of the border and lamented that the EU hadn't moved Italy's proposal for a modest civilian training initiative forward last year. Carnelos went on to add that while weapons smuggling across the border remains a problem, the fact that Hizballah's weapons stores are already so large means that whatever additional smuggling may be going on is insignificant in comparison.

GOI and Saudis Agree - Christians are key  
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15. (C) Carnelos said the GOI foresees big problems ahead if the Christian community in Lebanon remains divided, and that Saudi Arabia agrees. The Saudis are sending the president of their national security council equivalent body to Rome soon for meetings at the Vatican to encourage the Vatican to play a stronger and more positive role with the Lebanese Christians.

Asad Surprisingly Optimistic on Lebanon  
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16. (C) PM Prodi made a brief call August 6 to Syrian President Bashar al-Asad. According to Carnelos, Asad was strangely optimistic about Lebanon, saying that though he would prefer Lebanon had a less anti-Syrian President, Lebanon could not afford to have poor relations with Syria given their economic and social interdependence. Carnelos said neither the Syria/Lebanon border issues nor the flow of

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foreign fighters into Iraq were raised.

Comment  
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17. (C) Pezzotti was adamant that Italy firmly supports a technical roll-over and opposes expansion of the UNIFIL mandate. It is a position they appear to have concerted with Lebanese PM Siniora. This stems at least in part from ongoing Italian concern for the safety of their troops on the ground. And because of the perceived implications for their military contingent, the Italians follow closely the twists and turns of the Lebanon government crisis and Lebanese-Syrian relations. The PM speaks regularly with Siniora and periodically with Asad. While we have hammered the Iraq border/foreign fighters theme at every opportunity in our encounters here, and most recently by the Ambassador with FM D'Alema (reftel), it is instructive that Prodi evidently did not even raise the issue with Asad. And on Syria-Lebanon border monitoring, Carnelos' comments suggest that the GOI still prefers to explore some variant of the EU monitors option rather than change the UNIFIL mandate. End Comment.  
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